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JEAN RIBAUT AND QUEEN ELIZABETH

WITH the approach of the centenary celebration of the Louisiana purchase the mind reverts to the first French colony within the present limits of the United States, a colony which, owing to the utter want of foresight and practical experience on the part of its leaders, was attended with lamentable failure. But the men who planted it, though unfitted for colonial ventures, were full of daring and enterprise, and it may not be without interest to clear up an obscure period in the life of its founder, the Huguenot Jean Ribaut, a typical character of that period when France was distracted with internecine wars, and the men trained in its school were ready for every species of adventure.

In the year 1562 Jean Ribaut, having established a settlement at Port Royal, in South Carolina, sailed away for France, in the expectation of returning in the course of a few months with supplies and reinforcements for the small body of men he had left there. The date of his arrival in France, at the end of July of the same year, was a most unpropitious moment for the future of his little colony. Civil war, fomented by England and Spain, each ostensibly in the interest of religion, was raging between the Catholic and Huguenot parties, and the unity of his country was in imminent danger. Coligny, the original promoter of the colonial scheme, was immersed in the fratricidal struggle, and could give Ribaut and his enterprise but passing attention, and so the settlement at Charlesfort was left to its fate. Ribaut is said to have taken an active part in the war, and at the conclusion of the peace of Amboise, which was signed in March, 1563, betook himself to England, where in the summer of the same year he published the results of his Florida expedition. The histories tell us that he there offered his services to Elizabeth, but give no additional details. What actually occurred, so far as it can be gathered from the correspondence of the Spanish ambassadors at the English court, is somewhat remarkable.

Ribaut did not confine himself to the arts of peace alone, for the experience and knowledge he had acquired in Florida were more than sufficient to secure him a ready admission into the circle of adventurers who were just beginning to display their activity and to lay the foundations of the English navy. It is evident that he had in no wise become discouraged at Coligny's failure for the time

being to assist the colony in Florida and was seeking eagerly about him for resources to further the enterprise. Through what channel his presence in England became known to Queen Elizabeth we have no present means of knowing, but it seems probable that he could have been but a short time in the country before he obtained an audience with the queen. Ribaut set before her the importance and wealth of Florida, and urged her to assist him in its conquest. Elizabeth, after listening to his relation, began to refuse him her immediate help, "so that if Philip should complain she would be able to swear that nothing had been done by her order", although her official relations with Spain at the time were not of the most friendly nature. However, she urged Ribaut to undertake the adventure himself, promised him half of all that he found, and added that even were the country not so good as she had been told, it was on the way of the ships from New Spain, Peru, and elsewhere, which Ribaut could safely seize.¹ But the temptation proved too great to be long withstood even by Elizabeth's tender conscience, and she ended by offering him a pension of 300 ducats and a house as an inducement to undertake the discovery. At a later period, when the incident was closed, Ribaut disclaimed ever having accepted the bribe.²

However this may be, it appears that in May, 1563, the notorious Thomas Stukely was arming a fleet of five vessels, to which Ribaut had contributed one and Elizabeth another. The crew was 300 strong, and the fleet, which was well equipped with supplies, ammunition, and artillery, flew the royal standard presented by the queen herself. There were three French pilots aboard, who had previously accompanied Ribaut to Florida. Quadra, Philip's ambassador in London, was himself inclined to attach some credit to the current rumor that it was designed to attack Florida; but it was also said that its object was to assail the Spanish vessels returning from the Indies.³

Stukely, who had sought and obtained an interview with the ambassador, gave Quadra to understand that he was urged on in the undertaking by the government, but for all that Quadra was not wholly disposed to trust his revelations. Stukely then became most

¹ Silva relates this on the authority of Stukely; see Guzman de Silva to Philip II., London, October 22, 1565, in *Correspondencia de Felipe II. con sus Embajadores en la Corte de Inglaterra, 1558 à 1584*, II. 214. English translation in *Spanish State Papers 1558-1567*, I. Elizabeth, 495.

² Quadra to Philip II., London, June 26, 1563, *Correspondencia de Felipe II.*, I. 527; see also Guzman de Silva to Philip II., London, March 30, 1566, *ibid.*, II. 292, English translation in *Spanish State Papers 1558-1567*, I. Elizabeth, 536.

³ Quadra to Philip II., London, May 1, 1563, *Correspondencia de Felipe II.*, I. 512; same to same, June 19, 1563, *ibid.*, 524. English translations of these letters in *Spanish State Papers 1558-1567*, I. Elizabeth, 322, 334.

profuse in his protestations of friendship for Spain, telling Quadra that he was leaving England dissatisfied and desperate, but with the intention of going into the service of Philip, and that he had risked all of his property in the enterprise. He requested Quadra that on his arrival in any Spanish port or elsewhere in Spanish possessions he should be recognized as a servant of the king. Quadra met his advances with caution, and replied that the thing was impossible, given the friendly relations existing between England and Spain, unless his destination were for parts not included within the Spanish lines of demarcation. And at last the true object of the expedition became apparent, as well as the importance of the part that Ribaut was expected to play, for Stukely answered that no one had visited the country where he was going, except a few Frenchmen a short time before, and that it was but three days distant from Cuba. Quadra then told him roundly that in such case the thing was an impossibility, because the land fell within the lines of demarcation. But Quadra's suspicions were not allayed by Stukely's apparent frankness, which he regarded as merely a cunning device on his part for safeguarding the expedition from Spanish attack. In the letter relating these circumstances, which he wrote to Philip II., he expressed his opinion that the enterprise was really due to French as well as English intrigue, adding, "I have no assurance that he carries a commission; it seems to me that his project is a result of the determination . . . reached by the Admiral of France [Coligny] and of those who govern here to harass that commerce [of the Indies] and to conquer Your Majesty on the Ocean Sea." "I expect to talk about it to the queen", he continues, "although I know what answer she will make me, which is the same answer she has given me on former occasions, and which she has also written me."¹ A week later Quadra wrote that not only was the fleet destined for Florida, but for the very spot where Ribaut had founded his colony, and that Ribaut had promised to turn over to Stukely, together with its small garrison, the fort that he had built there.

The affair was brought to a sudden and most unexpected termination, as far as Ribaut was concerned, by the discovery that he and the three French pilots had planned to escape to France with the ships and hostages. The outcome of it was that Ribaut was seized, thrown into prison, and threatened with hanging, while the three pilots were put into chains and kept to conduct Stukely's fleet.²

In the light of contemporary events it is permissible to doubt whether Ribaut had at any time intended to betray the Florida colony

¹ Quadra to Philip II., June 19, 1563, *Correspondencia*, I. 524; *Spanish State Papers 1558-1567*, I. Elizabeth, 334.

² Quadra to Philip II., June 26, 1563, *Correspondencia*, I. 527.

into English hands. Havre was still occupied by the English, and it was only on July 29 of this very year that it was finally returned to France after fierce fighting under its walls and after the plague had decimated its English garrison; and Calais, which Elizabeth was most anxious to recover, was still held by the French. Ribaut was a brave, cool, and determined man, as subsequent events proved, and moreover he was a Frenchman; which means that he loved his native soil with the devotion that preëminently distinguishes his race and has made of it the most home-loving of people. This dramatic incident in Ribaut's career occupied less than two months, and it may well be supposed that the hardy Dieppois, who, like the French of to-day, probably looked upon all foreigners as barbarians, was not at all averse to practising a clever trick on Stukely and his English queen, and had entered into his engagements at the very outset with this end in view.

Whether he was released from his English prison or managed to make his escape we do not know. There is good reason to believe that he was still in confinement at the date of the sailing of the second expedition, under Laudonnière, on April 22 of the following year,¹ but he was back again in France in time to head the fleet that sailed in May of 1565 to the relief of the ill-fated colony in Florida, where he suffered the death of a brave man with the fortitude of a Christian.

When some two years later Philip notified Elizabeth of his indisputable rights to Florida, the French aggressions there, and the chastisement he had inflicted upon them, the crafty queen did not forget her caution. She congratulated Philip on his success, and bade de Silva convey her thanks to his king for having advised her of the event. At the same time Elizabeth expressed her surprise at learning that Florida had been discovered and occupied by Spain. In her ignorance of Philip's right, "she had always believed that Captain Ribaut had been the first to have discovered it; for he had come to her with the news of its discovery, and she had determined to send to conquer it herself", and she concluded by asking Philip's pardon for what she had done.² The incident establishes beyond doubt that Stukely was merely the instrument of Elizabeth in carrying out her serious designs to occupy Florida, and that the rumor of such an intention was not a mere blind given out to conceal an ulterior object of preying upon the Spanish fleets, as some have supposed.³

WOODBURY LOWERY.

¹ Stefano de Rojomonte in his deposition states that Ribaut was still in prison at the date of sailing of the second expedition in April, 1564. See *Noticias de la población que habian hechos los Francés en la Florida*, Archivo General de las Indias, Seville, MS. Patronato, Estante I; Cajon I; Legajo 1^{er}; Ramo 14.

² Silva to Philip II., March 30, 1566, *Correspondencia*, II. 292.

³ See *The School of Shakspeare*, by Richard Simpson, London, 1878, I. 32, *et seq.*